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Yamit Netter-Sweet



December 3, 2020

Hello and welcome to our little blast from the past!

You probably woke up this morning fully unaware that you'd stumble across our 2020 timecapsule, but here you are! We, a bunch of college students in Middlebury, Vermont, made this time capsule in December, 2020 to give you a snapshot of what our current world looks like.

While this is a fantastic idea for any year, 2020 has been especially momentous. You will learn more about it through the items in this box, but here are just a few highlights of 2020 in the U.S. that I have picked out (most are actually lowlights unfortunately...)

U.S. West Coast on Fire

Police Brutality against Black Americans (police killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and many more)

The Black Lives Matter Movement

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Ruth Bader Ginsberg's Death

Election of Joe Biden

While there were so many more major events, these are the major events that have defined my year. Everyone in my class will recognize these events as incredibly influential, but have you heard of them? Have these events, that completely shaped our year, made it into the history books? Is our 2020 remembered?

Obviously you cannot answer those questions for me, but hopefully you can read, look, and listen to this history. You can explore and learn from our time capsule and pass it along. You can teach others about what happened in 2020 and what life was like. You can compare it to your own life and see what has changed.

I hope this time capsule acts not only as an indicator of the past, but as an encouragement for the future as well. You may see some of our valued items that no longer exist in your time. While their lack of existence is incredibly sad, it is also a reminder to preserve what is important to you. Maybe my generation didn't protect our environment and our communities well enough, but you still can. You can act collectively, make decisions that benefit the greater good, and not give up on saving what is important to you. If you take anything from this time capsule, I hope it is a glimpse into history and an understanding that our mistakes should not and need not be repeated.

I wish you the best of luck with everything and thank you for finding this little piece of history!

Best,

Yamit Netter-Sweet

Ryan Gutheil



Dear time capsule finder,

My partner, Hannah, is seen here jumping over a rainbow. We used sidewalk chalk to draw this rainbow, which looped all the way around her semicircle driveway.

This photo is from April 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic in its early stages. Hannah and I were fortunate enough to be able to isolate ourselves in our homes to prevent the spread of the disease. Many people did not have the privilege to stay home, so we consider ourselves among the luckiest.

Even though we are among the most fortunate, the pandemic has been hard, especially emotionally. As I write this, it is currently December 1, 2020. More than eight months after this photo was taken, the virus continues to make it hard to connect with people we love. And now, the nights are getting darker, the days are getting colder, and we prepare for an uncertain, scary, lonely winter.

Early in 2020, rainbows were a symbol of hope. The rainbow in this image represents my intrinsic wish to turn away from the fear and the sadness, even as the present and future appear existentially dark. It represents my hope for my generation, and my hopes for you.

I hope that you are finding this note in health, in safety, in peace, and in love. And if so, I would hope that you may be able to express gratitude to those around you who make you feel healthy, safe, peaceful, and loved.

Best wishes.

Amanda Werner



December 1, 2020

To the future dwellers of Earth:

If you are reading this letter, it means that you have unearthed our time capsule from the year 2020. This message is just one of many that you will find within the capsule, which was created by students at Middlebury College under the direction of Professor Dan Suarez for the course entitled “Environmental Justice in the Anthropocene.” The challenge was to represent the sentiments of our time in just one image and convey a message to future dwellers of Earth.

I have chosen a Dammit Doll to represent the sentiments of our time. The purpose of a Dammit Doll is conveyed in a humorous poem on its chest:

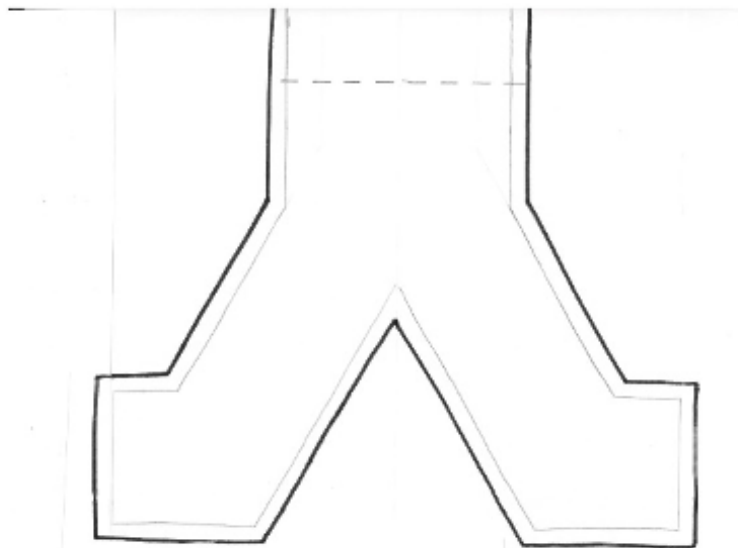
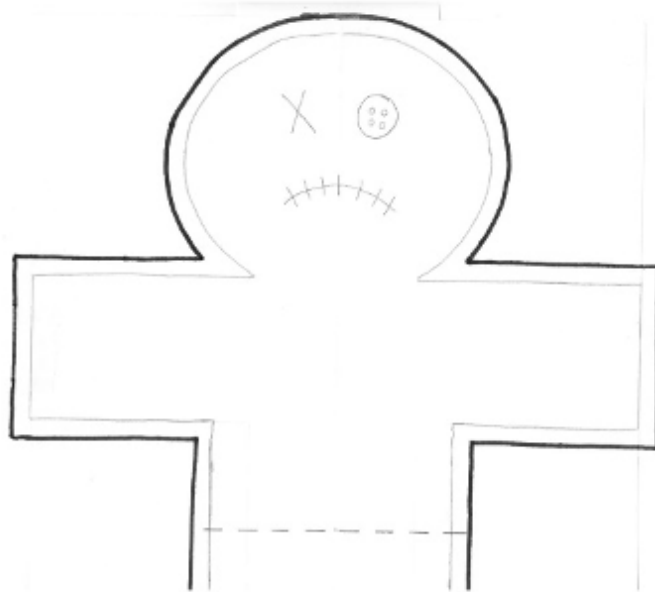
Whenever things don't go so well,
And you want to hit the wall and yell,
Here's a little Dammit Doll,
That you can't do without.
Just grasp it firmly by the legs
And find a place to slam it.
And as you whack the stuffing out
Yell “Dammit! Dammit! Dammit!”

(The English language has probably changed drastically since 2020, so I would like to note that “dammit” is a word expressing frustration. And many people would not say it around children.)

A Dammit Doll is essentially a stress-reliever: Whacking it against the wall or desk or any other surface helps release negative emotions (frustration, anger, worry, stress) that you might be experiencing. In 2020, there are plenty of reasons for frustration. Our fossil-fuel lifestyles are endangering the life of the planet and the lives of future generations. Right-wing populism and antidemocratic governments are rampant. Governments cannot seem to get the global COVID-19 pandemic under control. It all seems insurmountable. I am sure that you, the future dwellers of Earth, are also dealing with issues that seem insurmountable. But history shows that progress is not chronological. It is often one step forward and two steps back. Every generation throughout history has viewed the problems of their time as the end-all. Every generation has a sense of impending doom, a fear of the end of human civilization. Yet we are still here. I am sorry if the problems of my time have continued into yours. My hope is that my generation will be able to solve most of these issues and that you will only need to read about them in history textbooks. Consider the Dammit Doll a gift from the past, something that connects me to you: When hope seems scarce and frustrations run high, a Dammit Doll could come in handy.

With hope for a brighter future,
Amanda Werner
Middlebury College, Class of 2021

P.S. Because college went “online” during the pandemic, I could not include an actual Dammit Doll – only an image of it. But you could try to make your own (instructions included)!



How to Make Your Own Dammit Doll!

These instructions were written by a woman named Staci for her blog “Crafty Staci,” which can be found here with helpful pictures (if you still have the Internet):

<https://www.craftystaci.com/blog/dammit-doll>.

To make one, you’ll need this pattern, pieced together by matching the dotted line and sides, a piece of fabric, fusible fleece (if your fabric is thick you can skip it), a button, some craft thread and stuffing.

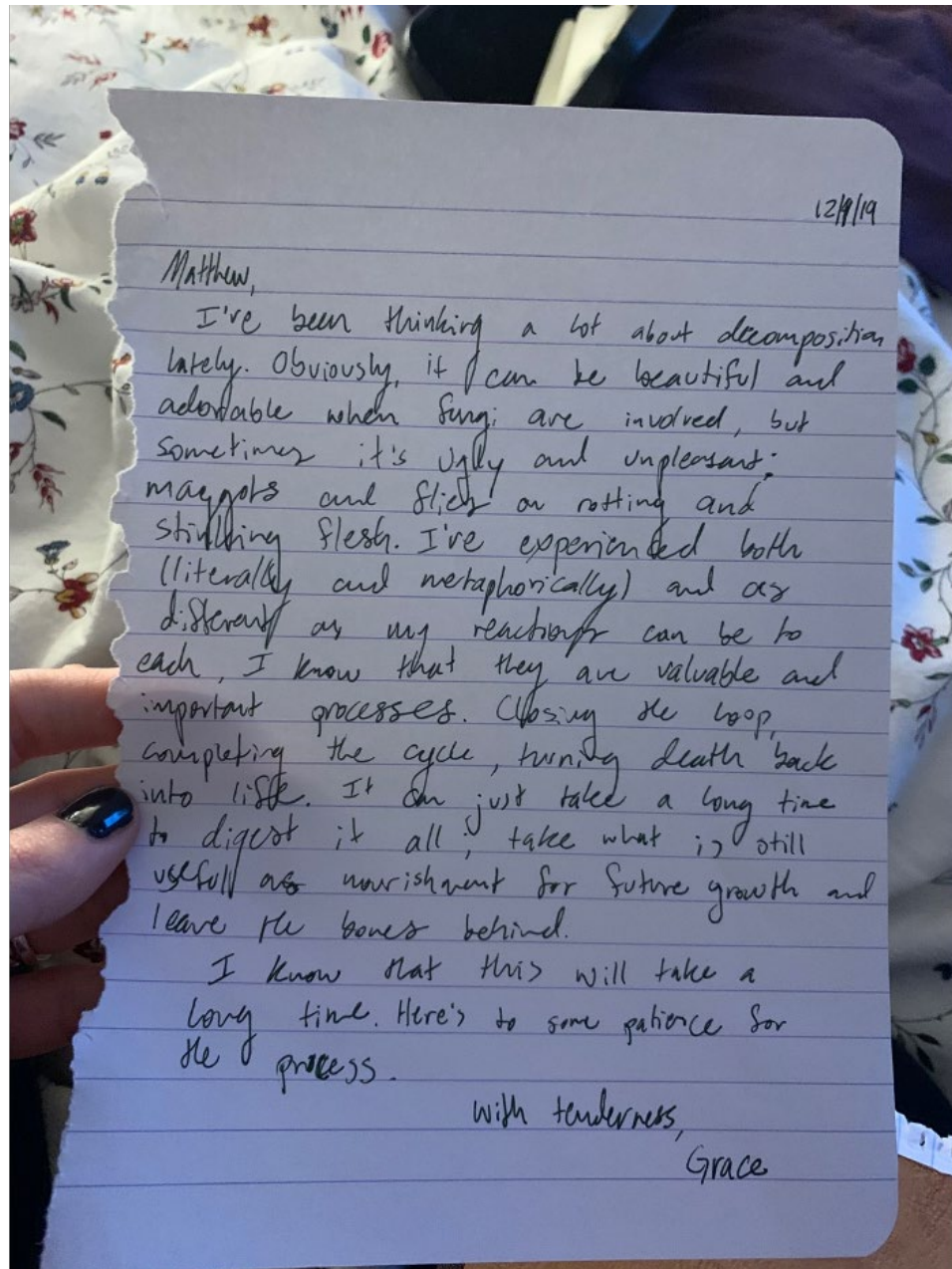
Iron the fleece onto the back of each fabric piece. Using the pattern as a guide, sew on the button for one eye, an X for the other and the mouth using craft thread.

Pin the two fabric pieces with right sides together. Stitch a 1/4” seam around the edge, leaving 2” open on one side. Clip all corners.

Turn him right side out. Stuff the doll through the opening in the side, using a stick to push the stuffing into the legs, arms and head. Hand stitch the opening closed.

If you like your Dammit Doll bald, you’re done, but I like a little 80’s rock star hair whipping around. Cut 6” pieces of craft thread, stitch them through the top of the head at the seam about 1/4” apart, and tie knots. Trim, braid or just give it a shake.

12/2/2020



A meditation on decomposition and reassembly

In this time capsule I've included three photos: one of the art hanging on my wall, one of a short essay written by the poet Ross Gay, and one of a letter to my boyfriend, written shortly after our breakup. I wanted these contributions to feel personal and intimate, but to still speak to something larger than my single life. I've always been fascinated by mushrooms and fungi—their multitude of textures, colors, and sizes, but also the beauty and mystery of the process that

they represent: decomposition. Each of my photos relates to this topic. I'll start with the pictures on my wall.

In this assembly of items there are letters and postcards from friends, cross-stitch and collages that I've made, a coaster from a bar, a page from a vintage anatomy textbook, a reprint of Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus," and, in the lower right corner, my favorite block print. The text on it reads "LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL. LIFE IS PAINFUL... GO TO THE WOODS. CONTEMPLATE DECOMPOSITION."

I'm at a stage of my life where I'm hardly in one place for more than three or four months at a time, often less. Everywhere I go I take these artifacts with me, adding and subtracting some over the years, and rearrange them on my new walls. This to me is decomposition. At the close of each cycle, I deconstruct what once was, keeping the component parts of it that still speak to me and taking them on to fill my new life. Regenerating something new from something old. Making me feel at home wherever I am. In the year 2020, life has certainly been painful, destructive, and full of loss. Life has also been magically beautiful, strengthening bonds between me and those in my network and my relationship with myself.

I am contemplating decomposition.

Next is chapter 60 from Ross Gay's *The Book of Delights*. I took this photo while reading in my favorite chair at the Ilsley Public Library in Middlebury, VT to share on social media. The book is composed of short essays written on the subject of delight, with Gay's attention to the term being one that is dynamic and searching: rather than focusing only on easy joys, he makes it his project to find delight in a complicated and uneasy life. In this section he describes fungal duff, the mycelium-rich forest soil that is full of networking strands of fungi, working to keep the life growing above the ground in communication with each other and stocked with the resources that they need.

I always have to read his essays multiple times to parse through the layers of his words. Read this one allowed to someone you love, if you can. See what you can make out of it.

Finally, the photo I am most uncomfortable sharing. I have a perhaps odd habit of taking photos of all of the letters and cards that I write, which is why I still have a record of this one. Our break-up was sudden and unexpected. He initiated it, but it was deeply painful on both sides, taking several long conversations for the separation to finally stick. I dropped this letter off at his room with a bag of books and clothes of his to return. In it, I allude to my love of mushrooms and to my past experience with forensic science, in which I studied the stages of decomposition and forensic entomology by regularly visiting a rotting pig (photo not included). I think I say most of what I want to say in that letter. As with the natural world, I am constantly going through

this process, restarting it over and over again. I sift through what I want to continue carrying with me and to fit into the constantly regenerating versions of myself and try my best to leave what is no longer alive for me behind.

I hope that you take this as an invitation, and let's contemplate together.

Grace Weissman

Elizabeth Reyes

Hi friends,

My time capsule piece is this illustration of me doing yoga. I first began yoga when we were kicked out of campus back in March. I returned home to The Bronx when cases in New York City were soaring and we were well on to having the highest record of COVID cases. I didn't leave my house for 63 days. More and more, COVID began hitting closer to home and soon loved ones became ill. Yoga was recommended to me as a way to practice mindfulness. I began doing yoga to distract myself from my problems. I remember when I first found out that you are twice as likely to pass away from COVID if you live in The Bronx than any other borough and

how much environmental racism has fueled the coronavirus. Minutes after reading about that on the news I got my yoga mat in the mail. This year has been the toughest year of my life. Through everything that's happened this year, I'm forever thankful yoga has been a way to care of myself.

I hope you are all taking care of yourselves and surrounding yourselves with things and people who fill you with joy and encourage you to be your best self. Take care of yourselves and one another!

Kindly,

Elizabeth Reyes

Gabrielle Martin



December 2, 2020

Hello friend,

I hope you are well and hydrated.

My name is Gabrielle Martin. I am 21 years old, I love funky sweaters and pickles, and my whole life I have always been surrounded by music. In this time capsule, I have enclosed a picture of my recorder from elementary school music class. My US-born parents met in Siena, Italy while playing in a festival concert. Once they were married back in The States, my father paid his share of the rent by playing trumpet in national Broadway tours while my mother taught choral music and music theory to elementary and junior high school students. After I was born, my father joined my mother in the teaching profession, directing jazz and symphonic band at a high school in Queens, New York. I grew up around pianos, strings, guitars, Mozart, The Talking Heads, John Coltrane, Diana Ross, Maurice Ravel, Stevie Wonder, Judy Collins, The Beatles, and Aaron Copeland alike. (Look them up.) Music was never a choice in my life, but it has always been something that grounds me, feeds me, and brings me home.

In elementary school, each of us tiny students were given a recorder. We made lanyards out of yarn so that the instrument would stay around our neck and deter us from blowing into one another's grubby, germey recorders. A second-grade recorder concert could be the soundscape to any nightmare, but it started out an entire class of children on a journey to finding and making music in their lives. I feel so privileged to have had music teacher parents who stressed the importance of music education in my life, from the time I was born up until now as I write you this letter.

Music—like many of the arts—teaches creativity, listening, collaboration, empathy, and love. As the present world steep itself in indefinite economic fragility, music and the arts are the first disciplines pulled from school funding. While music disappears from curriculums and classrooms, so does spatial awareness, imagination, healthy mental and emotional regulation skills, the ability to work cooperatively, and the indication that music is sacred in the lives of human beings. In a world with ever-diminishing empathy, music making and imagination should be nurtured. Music is something to get up in the morning for, to use in protest, to soothe, and to share in strengthening community.

I hope that your generation is still teaching and making music. The world as we know it is changing fast as temperatures rise, nations are split by political and moral ideologies, police murder Black folks on TV, the wealth gap increases, and global pandemics take millions of lives. I cannot imagine how much it has changed by the time you are reading this. How do we conjure hope for the future if not through art and song?

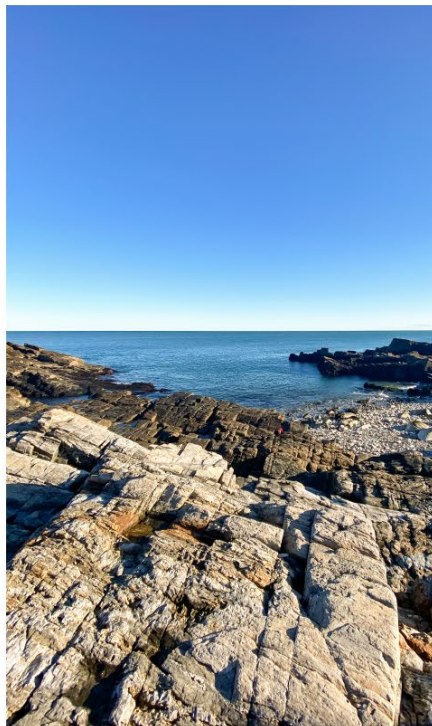
I wish you peace, good rest, and good music. Especially if it is a second-grade recorder concert.

All my love to the future,

Gabrielle Martin

Andrés Oyaga

Falmouth, Maine 2019



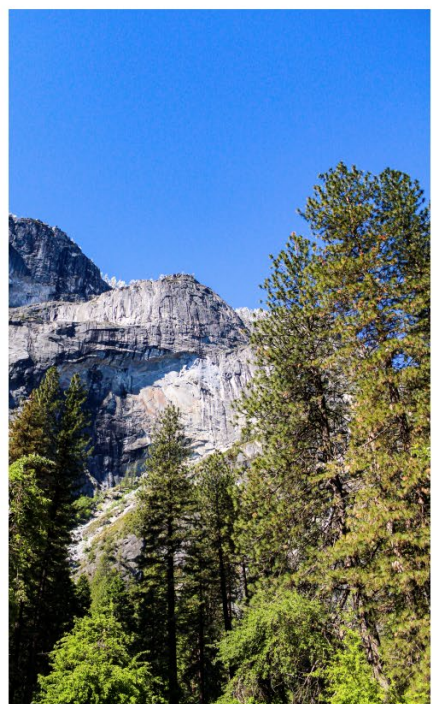
South Portland, Maine 2020



Leo Carrillo, California, 2019



Joshua Tree, California, 2018



Yosemite Valley, California, 2019



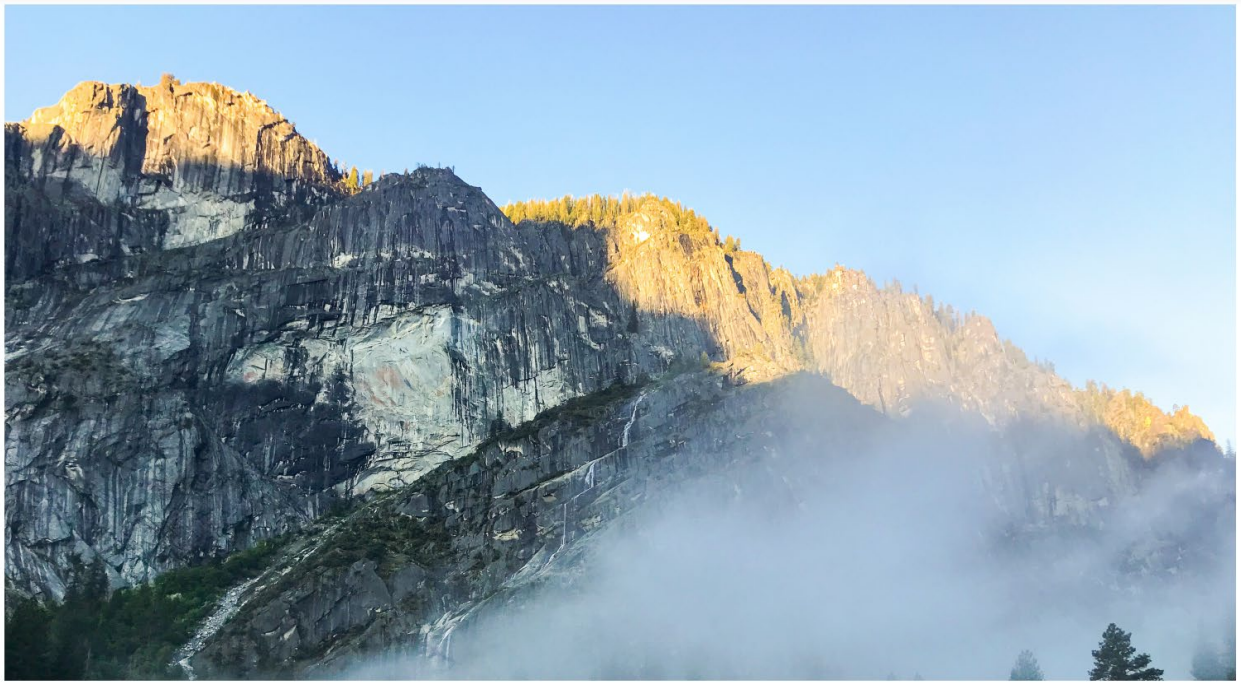
Yosemite (Merced River), California, 2019



Yosemite, California, 2019



Yosemite, California, 2019



Yosemite, California, 2019



Joshua Tree, California, 2019



Joshua Tree, California, 2018

I've chosen to share a collection of images I've taken in the recent past (2017-2020). Each location is of deep significance to me. They are natural places where I experienced personal awakenings and revelations; where I came out to myself, decided where I would go to college, worked one of my first jobs, finished significant writings, learned to love myself more fully, and grew into the person I am today.

They were places of radical thought and reflection.

I share these images not out of fear that they will disappear, because I am confident that our generation will fight tooth and nail to prevent complete ecological and societal collapse. Nor do I wish to force upon you this cliché and elitist narrative that the “wilderness” is the only adequate place for personal growth.

Rather, I share these images as a reminder to always think and reflect—wherever and however that may be. To grow into your authentic self, to challenge established ways of thinking, and to never accept anything less than what is just. In this constant state of thought and reflection, I have become a happier individual, with a deep passion and moral obligation to care for people and place. It is by questioning one's own values, beliefs, and discomforts that allow us to grow into more conscious citizens of the world. In doing so, I believe re-imaginings of our accepted reality will naturally come to you.

It may be hard to do this at times, especially if your culture is still as individualistic as mine and discourages any disruption. But you must do whatever you can to transcend these dangerous modes of thinking and cultivate an alternative way of thinking for yourself and your loved ones.

So, I invite you to reflect and think, whether that be in these spaces I've enjoyed or in a totally different location.

To the future:

Naomi Klein, in *This Changes Everything*, encourages us to go beyond simply proposing alternative sets of politics but also “an alternative worldview... embedded in interdependence rather than hyper-individualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy.”

What a daunting task. In this call to embrace and push for a large paradigm shift, I find myself incredibly overwhelmed by the thought of such a large-scale cultural revolution that inherently contradicts established economies, cultures, and politics in (parts) of the USA. If our current government cannot support its citizens with a second COVID-19 stimulus package, how are we *ever* going to normalize mutual aid, community support, and overall selflessness?

As Indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchú suggests in her autobiography *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, “Este mundo no va a cambiar a menos que estemos dispuestos a cambiar nosotros mismos.” Menchú is calling on us to change ourselves if we hope to see any change in the world around us. Now, I'm sure folks may disagree with this very individual approach to a cultural revolution (I know I don't agree with it completely), but it is nonetheless a great place to start. So, to folks in the future, whatever year it may be that you open this time capsule, I urge you to embrace Menchú's call to action. From what I am observing today, the staunch individualism will not be rooted out unless we make an effort to yank out the roots within ourselves. In doing so, we can lead others by example and inevitably make interdependence, reciprocity, and cooperation a cultural norm. I wish my optimism and hopefulness were not naïve and that this communal world I desire is a reality in your future.

In compiling this contribution to the time capsule, I thought about how I could show you all how I personally entertained Menchú's suggestion of self-change. I thought about sharing some journal entries or excerpts from various authors, but none felt personal enough. So, I decided to share with you all the *places* where I have engaged in what I consider radical thought and reflection; places where I've questioned religion, capitalism, relationships, and my identity. It isn't a complete list of all the places I've engaged in this self-change, but the prettiest places (to me)! I hope you also find these places beautiful, and I hope you can find your own places to think and reflect.

I hope that your reality is one that is already liberated and embraces a worldview of communal well-being. If not, please never let up. So many people have come before you, and you must honor their legacy and continue onward.

With peace,

Andrés Oyaga, December 2020

Sophia Nieves



Dear future humans and non-humans:

With my submission to our 2020 time capsule, I am hoping to preserve the experience of playing rugby outside with my sister and to relay to future beings the profound importance of this experience and the joy it brings me. My photograph shows my twin sister tossing a rugby ball, outside in the fresh air, on green grass.

Since we are in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the experience of enjoying fresh air maskless is already scarce. COVID-19 safety regulations require the rugby team at Middlebury College to practice with face masks, making it harder to exercise and run around to our full potential. Additionally, in an effort to maintain 6-feet physical distancing, we are not allowed to tackle, fundamentally changing rugby, a contact sport. Before this pandemic, humans in parts of the world had already begun wearing face masks, a way to prevent the health effects of polluted air. In this way, the experience of running around and playing outside mask-free will become less and less likely with the continuing air pollution all throughout the world. The mask-wearing in the current pandemic may only be a warm up for a routine we may continue to follow in the future.

The second important imagery shown in my submission is the green grass. In the suburban United States, I would say almost all the members of my generation can relate to the experience of playing outside in the green grass, whether it be in an organized soccer match or with friends after school. I don't, however, believe this will be an experience that translates to future generations. As the earth warms, droughts kill grass and green fields are replaced with brown. Additionally, the neoliberal system encourages innovation and materialism, which has caused a shift from natural grass fields to artificial turf fields. I hope future beings may be able to experience this imagery beyond just submissions to a time capsule, that they may also experience it in real life.

Practicing rugby with my sister is my favorite activity, and my submission is my own personal commitment to fighting for this activity to exist in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to stay at home to stop the spread of the virus and protect our communities. Being in quarantine at home has made me realize how much I truly enjoy playing (full contact) rugby with other people outside. I am currently unable to practice my favorite activity because of the pandemic, but the idea of this experience not existing in the future is terrifying. I am committing myself to working towards a future that will allow this experience to continue and be thoroughly enjoyed. Not only must I fight for an environmental system that allows us to play outside, but I must also work to preserve a certain type of society that fosters a sense of community. Or rather, a community that allows humans to come together in organized sport. Not every human civilization has members that relate to each other in a way that compels them to play organized sports.

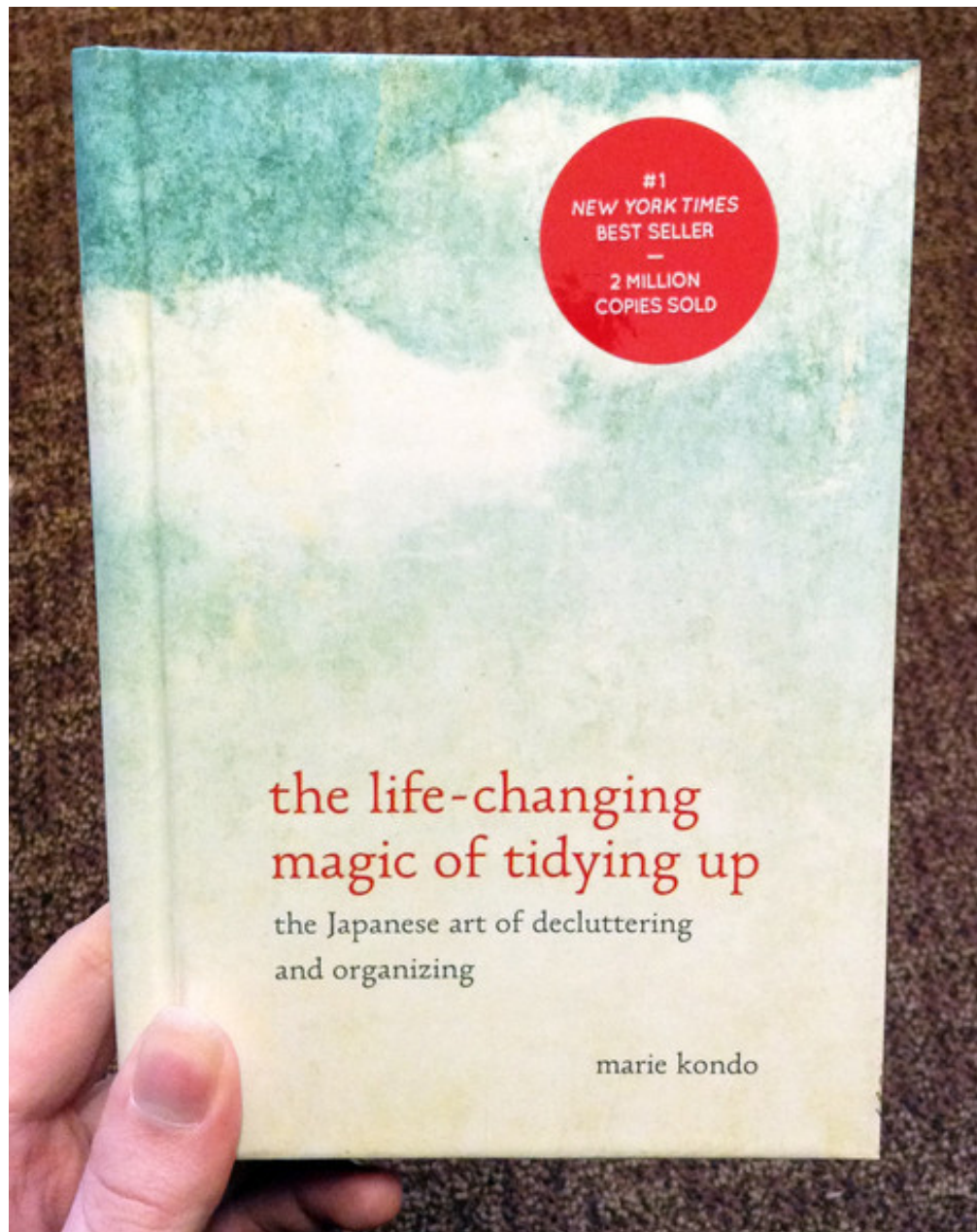
I would like future beings to understand how much I love playing rugby. Yes, I would love for others to experience the same profound joy I get from running around and tackling, however

what is more important to me is that I preserve the conditions that make this experience possible, so that others can make what they want out of green grass, fresh air, and a ready community.

Best,

Sophia Nieves

Anna Wood



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Dear whoever comes across our time capsule,

I chose these three images because they represent important frameworks when thinking about environmental justice in our geological epoch, the anthropocene. I've included a plastic container of chia seeds, a self help book that encourages better individual choices, and a photo from a destination hiking trip. As a college student who loves the outdoors, exercise, wellness, and healthy foods, these photos are relevant to my life. In this letter, I confront the socio-ecological injustices associated with them.

Marie Kondo's *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up* reflects that, under neoliberal capitalism, humans have been conditioned to take more than what they need. Capitalist doctrines lead to extractivism, exploiting the environment. Kondo's guide advises readers to purge material possessions that do not elicit "joy". I argue that we should buy less stuff to begin with, especially if our stuff will not equate to long term happiness. The premise of Kondo's book is that material belongings do not make us happy, yet we are bred- through our education systems and workforce- to crush tasks and garner more *stuff*. Beyond Kondo, the popular "self help" book genre demonstrates a hyper focus on individual improvement, rather than collective welfare. While our individualist mindset stems from western colonization, deregulated capitalism most greatly affects our consumption behaviors and lack of empathy for marginalized groups. However, I sense some promise for the future in how *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up* rejects consumerism. Instead, the book idealizes minimalism. I assume- and hope!- our species will have adopted more minimalist tendencies by the time this message is read.

The plastic container of chia shows a similar ambivalence. The postcolonial return of chia to our diets epitomizes a hijacking of indigenous knowledges. Native plant foods, including chia, used to be prepared and eaten in strictly holistic manners. Now it is sold at Target, a corporation that mass produces cheap goods. The particular brand in the photo packages the chia in a plastic container that will pollute the earth. Just as our current environmentalism disassociates traditional ideologies from ecology, packaged chia strips away traditional food and agricultural practices. It has been a long time since we have respected nature as its whole form, rather than its pleasing parts.

Last but not least, the photograph of the Mount Kilimanjaro campsite depicts ecotourism, globalization, and environmental accessibility. The trip leaders and tourists were predominantly white Americans. On the other hand, the porters, guides, and cooks were young adult men from the local area. The Global South is becoming increasingly dependent on Global North, making profits from agriculture and tourism. I wonder about the future; what will become of these communities?

It's 2020, a year of disequilibrium, uncertainty, political polarization, and daylighting. We're already trying to fight for our individual wellbeings; I hope, by the time this is read, we learn to do so as a collective species.

Jackson Evans



Hello! I hope you find this time capsule without too much effort. Do the few hundred pages of time capsule information provide unique additions to your understanding of history? Have our relics contributed to your knowledge of our current moment? Will they aid in your ability to reckon with the past, analyze the present, and reframe the future? I want to say that we are in “unprecedented times,” but what times are truly preceded? You likely feel more uncertainty than I, and so I hope to can provide you with more specific and personal knowledge you won’t find written in history or in the logs of the New York Times.

My name is Jackson Evans, and my mind is full of regret. Is Mathematics worth studying when I likely won't contribute significant research? Could I have done more, helped more, enjoyed more another field? My lesson to you is to be more decisive, otherwise risk superfluous regret. I am also worthless with creativity and expression, so this image is both an example of hope for myself, and a small example of precedent for you in the future.

The image above is a sticker produced by Middlebury College, plastered on and within every campus building in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This comes at an interesting moment and has significance beyond the surface. While Bill Gates predicted an ensuing pandemic a few years ago, his assessment was along Malthusian logic of a human population carrying capacity. Rather, this pandemic has wreaked so much havoc due to a failure in the global capitalist system to protect its constituents. In corporate fashion, we have therefore been subject to mass-produced graphics like shown above to stress the importance of an individual's ability to protect themselves and others. Putting a greater burden on the individual is typical of a capitalist and individualist society, but personal hygiene does have a significant impact on the wellbeing of communities, particularly communities hit the hardest by disease.

Despite the impersonal nature of these recurring graphics, my image hopes to show the creativity latent - and far too often slumbering - within people. In spite of challenging circumstances, the pandemic established uncertainty that aided in one of the largest protest movements ever in the Black Lives Matter movement, and an increase in creative expression as an outlet. Following Rebecca Solnit's writing, this image attempts to harness uncertainty in the present and future, and experiments with creativity and the reframing of expression to combat excessive optimism and pessimism. I intend to inspire some hope as an anathema to perfectionism. As you, Middlebury residents, either continue to move forward in progressive causes or struggle to survive on a rapidly changing Earth, remember that every moment is unprecedented, every day provides an opportunity to reevaluate your goals and positively impact others.

What I find worth remembering may be entirely in 2100 or could be exaggerated further. Is nature still beautiful? The serenity and stunning orange hues of Middlebury sunsets bless the rolling hills and warm the soul. Are sunsets now radically different – is the sun now seen as a villain in your daily life, or is it more exaggerated and stunning than ever? Does nature imagery now hit you with pangs of longing for times past? More importantly, remember the dormant power you, and those around you, hold. Never forget that your creative expression and experimentation can both conjure a cohesive and powerful movement, but also lead to enjoyment and fulfilment; always try to have fun.

Kathryn van der Merwe

As I am sure you know, 2020 was a tumultuous year with COVID-19 and the wildfires; it felt rather apocalyptic. However, both a personal and national event was the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, where I am from. This is a part of our virtually unregulated systemic racism and the police brutality that goes unchecked and is widespread. Yesterday, on November 29th, I was in Minneapolis, near the George Floyd memorial (at the intersection of Chicago Ave. S and 38th St. East) and happened to see this adjacent memorial to George Floyd and other Black people murdered by police officers. As you can see, it is a graveyard which declares “Say Their Names” on the hill behind it. This is not one that regularly seen in the mainstream media yet I wanted to capture it for you because it shows that although George Floyd and a few others’ deaths were widely known, they are a few out of hundreds. On each gravestone, it says the individual’s name, age, city they died in, and “Rest In Power.” This shows our current age in which that police brutality is widespread in numbers and in geography and that it affects people of all ages; I was devastated to see a 4 year old and a 7 year old who were killed. Hopefully this is not the case for you, hopefully the memorial and phrase “rest in power” has manifested into an active public memory, for the killed to “rest in power” and the living to “say there name,” and that you are living in a time where it is not common or acceptable for systemic racism to manifest or even exist.

All my best,

Katie

Nora Peachin



This has been a very odd year for all of us. When you are reading this in the distant future, it may be hard for you to imagine a global pandemic ravaging the globe, causing millions of deaths and lost jobs and leaving the world much more lonely, depressed and anxious than it was a year earlier. These are difficult and painful (or *unprecedented*, as so many have described them) times. Many of us are being confronted with the realities of death, illness and mourning in ways that we had not expected to be.

Some have likened the sorrow of this moment to the sorrows they feel about the rapidly deteriorating state of our Earth. I'm not sure that I agree entirely with this comparison, although I do feel an intense sadness for both.

So, in these *unprecedented* times, and in the many, *many* more to come (thanks to climate change) where can we find hope? Where can we find small glimmers of joy that will keep us going and keep us fighting against the forces driving inequality and environmental degradation?

For me, inspiration comes from the past. Pictured above are my dad (left) and maternal grandmother (right). My dad spent his college years protesting the Vietnam War, into which he was almost drafted, and worrying about nuclear attacks. My grandmother grew up poor in Germany during World War II. When I look at what my family members, and so many others before me, have been through — the challenges they have overcome — I am reminded of the immense power of perseverance and hope.

Nora Bayley



December 3, 2020

Dear future beings,

Hello from the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, in one of the most globally uncertain and unstable eras of human history. This message, and accompanying image, will be included in a group time-capsule created by my class at Middlebury College, titled Environmental Justice in the Anthropocene. It is a class focused not just on the past, and the intricate and complicated processes that allowed the earth's climate to change in such a rapid way, but also on the future and the ways we can imagine and hope for a better world reality (that you are hopefully living in right now). The class has not been easy, giving us especially heavy and intense content each week regarding climate atrocities and horrors across the world, but these facts are not something that anyone should be unaware of.

Middlebury College, and the surrounding Vermont area, is poised to be an area in the United States that will remain relatively unchanged by the effects of climate change in the next hundred years, at least compared to other parts of the U.S. and the world. Its geographical location means that sea level rises will not be an issue (at least for some time), and intense temperature rises will be survivable for longer than in the south. The so-called 'Middlebury bubble' that us college kids live in extends even farther, to include a climate bubble that will remain relatively 'safe' from any catastrophic changes other parts of the world are already feeling.

Compared to the previous class' time capsule submissions, the ones from 2020 will be marked by the uncertainty, fear, and challenges brought on by the global pandemic that, as of December 1, 2020, had killed over 270,000 Americans in about eight months and infected more than 14 million people in the U.S. Our life at Middlebury was, for a time, reduced to a campus bubble, as we were prohibited from leaving the boundaries of the college campus in order to protect both ourselves and the townspeople of Middlebury. In a time of incredible struggle, when most humans would turn to their friends and family for solace and normalcy, the threat of the pandemic restricted that freedom.

Fall 2020 was the strangest fall at Middlebury I ever experienced. Yet, I found ways to still connect with loved ones, in a search for normalcy and connection with those I was physically apart from, by thousands of miles or just from social distancing requirements (staying at least six feet apart helped to reduce the spread of the virus). My included image is of my good friend Matteo enjoying the sunset over Lake Champlain, just 20 minutes away from campus. He was FaceTiming (video calling) his mother, who lived in New Jersey, in order to show her the incredible colors produced by the sunset. It was a beautiful collision of nature and technology and human connections, and although I also took other pictures of just the sky and lake that evening, this photo remains my favorite one.

Humans have always found ways to connect, even when apart, and this image is no different. I hope that these images and texts included by the class are able to convey this and that you are

able to understand who we are, and were, as people, as students, as friends, family, and citizens of the world. And I hope that whenever this capsule is unearthed and examined, that is still the case.

Nora Bayley

Middlebury College Class of 2021

Hometown: Red Wing, Minnesota

Eliza Robinson



November 16 at 11:19 AM · 🌐

Us: Overwhelmed with midterms, unable to see most of our friends, and having multiple mental breakdowns

Midd:





Image: The Middlebury Women's Soccer team enjoying a Fall dinner at the Knoll/Organic Farm. While many of our teammates took the semester off, we stayed connected as a group both in-person and virtually.

Dear Future,

The year 2020 has been one for the books. In choosing an image to submit and send into the future, I wanted to pick something that would encapsulate the year 2020 in many different ways.

Recently, I looked through a bunch of Middlebury yearbooks from the mid-1980s. In it, I found myself drawn to the images showing the time period, the changes that have occurred on Middlebury's campus, and similarities between myself and those pictured. In 2020, as we have lost much of our basic human interaction, it has become something we crave. I want to send a photo into the future that people can connect with. Maybe you could find someone you know in the picture, relate to the environment, or gain insight into a Fall at Middlebury in 2020.

My other goal was to present an image of Middlebury that represents the joys that can be found in the little things, even throughout all the rough patches in between. Taking the course Environmental Justice in the Anthropocene has pushed me to be hopeful about the future. There is so much hate and negative energy in the World, but I believe you have to hope that the future will change. Otherwise, all the negatives become far too overwhelming.

Aside from the photograph, I'd like to include a few facts about the current year to give you a snapshot of what the year has consisted of. A few significant events that occurred included wildfires across Australia, Ruth Bader Ginsburg passed away, and Kobe Bryant was killed in a helicopter crash. Sarah Fuller became the first woman to play in a Power 5 football game. Joe Biden was elected to become the next President. Kamala Harris became the first female Vice President and the highest-ranking female elected official in U.S. history. She will also be the first Asian-American and the first African American Vice President. Some of the year's top songs included Blinding Lights by The Weeknd, Don't Start Now by Dua Lipa, WAP by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, and many more! The app TikTok also became incredibly popular, which I believe was in part due to extreme boredom in the pandemic lockdown. The year isn't over yet though, and I am sure 2020 will throw a few more surprises at us.

Additionally, I included a meme from the Middlebury Facebook meme page. Before this year, I had no idea there was a meme Facebook page for the college. But this year, the memes were incredible! When everyday felt so new, and the future was unpredictable, the humor in the Middlebury community always kept the most challenging parts of the semester light. Below is one example; this was one of many created after the school offered one chocolate bar to on-campus students as a gift. It was very sweet, but the messaging made for some great memes.

Rather than asking questions about the future that I most likely won't be around to hear the answer, I want to give you a look into life during 2020 and the years surrounding it. I hope you enjoy the time capsule, and I wish you well!

All the best,
Eliza Robinson
Class of 2021.5

Pia Contreras



A Morning in December

The following is a description of a morning in December in San Juan, Puerto Rico in the year 2020.

It is 82 degrees Fahrenheit and partly cloudy.

There is a power hose blasting water at the concrete parking lot at the base of my apartment building. Cars are powering up and pulling out of the lot.

The hose is loud enough to drown out the sound of the waves crashing against the shore a mere 30 feet away.

Every once in a while you hear a car horn or the beeping of a garbage truck.

Most mornings it's possible to hear people, but today it's mostly just the sounds of the power hose pushing black water towards the storm drains.

I'm hearing these things out of the window of the seventh floor of an apartment building, the same one I have spent most of this year quarantining in. I am in my room where it smells like the pine scented candle I just lit.

I go to the kitchen and microwave a bowl of oatmeal.

After breakfast I go back to my room. The power hose stops and the crashing of the waves resumes.

You can also hear an airplane flying overhead from time to time.

My mom and sister are chatting in the kitchen. I also hear the coffee maker start up.

I started playing one of my new favorite songs, Mistaken for Granite by Golden Boy. I sing along a little, I don't know all of the words yet.

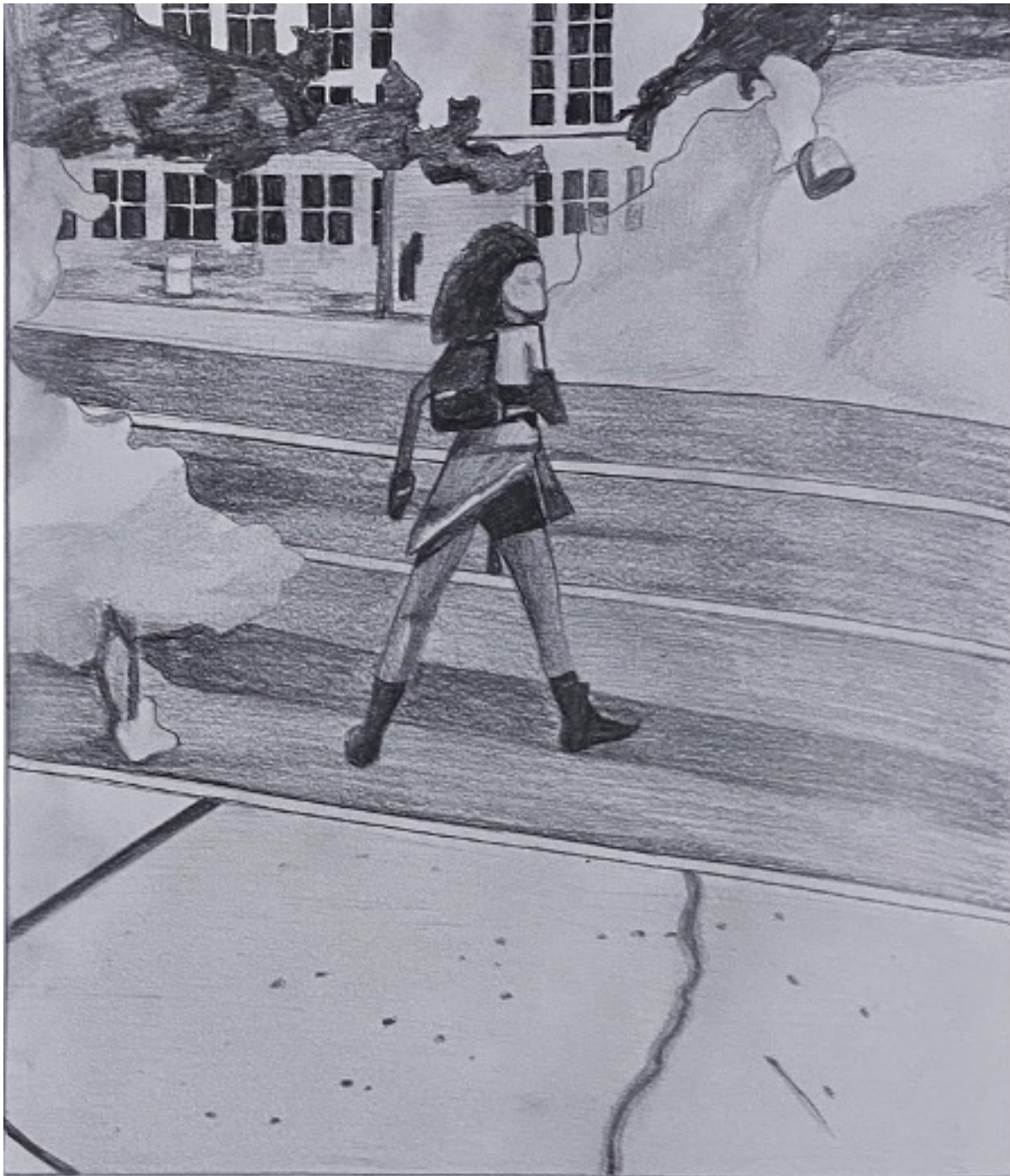
I listen out the window again for sounds of the city.

Soon the construction on the eighth floor will start back up and the sounds of drilling into concrete will take over. But until then, I can still hear the crashing of the waves 30 feet away.

Courtney Crawford







ACTION IS ETHICS

And we live in a country full to the brim of unethical people.
Taught the *art of inaction*
From the time they could walk
Away from conflict
Instead of confronting it.



Wise Burnt Umber Ones

These cadmium yellow and cadmium red fall-colored leaves in the spring – or is it summer now? rustle regardless, skeptical of the future – they taught me how to accept and see the world as it truly is and recognize that I assume, imagine, depict it a certain way in my mind because seeing a leaf as a child might has been taken away and those crinkly, wrinkly, wise burnt umber ones were ignored because they were dead not flashy like the material things accumulated on the grounds of the American Dream, that success means money and money means prosperity and prosperity means happiness and on this quest nobody tells you you'll lose sight of the leaves and now you can only see trees and the divisions grow unnoticed because it's all institutionalized, not personalized because those ever-widening gaps bridges can never seem to connect can't be justified if context is provided, truth carried by the wind whispering through the branches that shed their dwellers each time a storm comes around rejuvenating tears, there has been loss drenched across those who are too tied up in the end, taught to strive for the top of that office building in that big city you'll be a leader, but nobody tells you you'll forget the way it feels to be still like the leaves you stole and placed on your dresser until they shriveled up and lost their color because your greed told you to take take take, keep them for yourself and once you're taught this, the afternoon sun no longer feels quite as warm on your skin – Instead, you burn your palm grinding the crispy ones into bits that land in the grass at your feet you walk away astonished that you ruined innocence in that violent way admitting you did not think as the words left your mouth drier than before, wondering whether a wiser self might have consulted that wise burnt umber one that sat in the sun on the sidewalk you tread yesterday the world forgives because there's no use in forgetting your mistakes and the decisions you've made in this life I am alive again listening to the leaves tumble through blades of grass no longer silent, I immerse myself in the stillness as time stops and frustrations wane and I am one with the wise burnt umber ones.

On the Use of FaceTime While Isolated

We debate an agreed upon time – to ensure that we don't miss one another in the swing of daily activities the suburban middle class American engages in whilst within the confines of the home studying the dripping of coffee until the pot becomes so hot steam fogs it up, you pour your greatest liquid asset into your favorite mug and spend the morning wandering aimlessly, stopping occasionally to sit and scan through pages of a familiar book, the back cover half-torn and the front in tatters, read for the fifth time because the comfort of knowing what will happen next is not mirrored in this unpredictable world, you get up only to rest again in the next available armchair, contemplate swapping paper for screen but thinking better of it because you'll just wish you were somewhere else, you're lonely here – and a game of sorts, a little like chicken: who will call first?

Regardless of an attempt at a game you must plan your next interaction with someone you used to run into randomly during the day, but that's honestly ok because you feel lucky to still keep in touch with people you've grown to love, but then you have to muster up the courage to call ten digits – the abstract ones can't replace the ten that were used to embrace before the new normal – in order to access a face, which is really just a façade, and you can't remember how to talk because you haven't been up to much and current events and politics are exhausted at this point, yet you stumble on because you'd rather have long, awkward pauses than nothing at All the silence would be nice if the screen didn't laugh at you, daring you to stay silent a second longer you can't let it win, so you fill the gaps with whatever might be remotely relevant... lopsided smile plastered because you want the face on the screen to know that even though your body isn't there your mind is assuming a good FaceTime conversation is one that generates laughter rather than the deep ones had serious face to face.

We, the screen and I, converse for an hour or so, but eventually someone has got to go and it's hard to tell when the right time is to leave but the feeling's a little like microwaving popcorn, the accumulation of empty spaces between pops signals the timer is almost gone off anxious upon the thought of burnt popcorn you say "I should go" for fear of overstaying your welcome. Laptop whirring, disc almost full but you feel a little empty because FaceTime could never compare to bodies closer than six feet let alone a thousand miles. I wander out of my purple-walled room thinking about exotic-cinnamon tea, chaotic-themed summers and when we will see each other.

I DON'T LIVE A VERY DIFFICULT LIFE

I don't live a very difficult life
But as an American, I'm a bystander to strife

They say if you're a white moderate
You're the problem.

I live in a sea of "the problem"
I could easily choose to be "the problem."
I grew up thinking the good life was
not getting involved
not meddling in affairs

that others had gotten themselves tangled up in
But if I can help unravel the knots that an unjust system tied and that those with the power now hold taught
I must try.

Action is ethics
 And we live in a country full to the brim of unethical people
 Taught the art of inaction
 From the time they could walk
 Away from conflict
 Instead of confronting it.

The news is rife
 With stories containing stereotypes
 That act as a knife
 Of violence
 Slashing and thrashing

An unceremonious murder of a man whose
 Breath taken,
 Life stolen.
 As though the pillage of his history
 hadn't been enough.
 We turned it into a mystery
 For god's sake.
 Ignoring unethical action because how could we maintain
 A status quo that was crafted
 By the very men who believed in inequality
 So that they could keep their supremacy?
 This is no matter of compromise.

I don't live a very difficult life
 But as an American, I've embraced selfishness as progress.

There are those who say attention brings pain
 And pain is not the goal,
 But is pain not acknowledgement and
 To acknowledge meant pain
 So, we pretend not to notice.

And were we to live in blissful ignorance, there would be those who would not experience the
 pain of the massacre, of the loss and those who would bear it excruciatingly.

Spreading the word

Technology's goal.
Ethical?
It takes a toll.

Sharing the pain, spreading it out
Across synapses
Crossing spaces, we have placed between each other
We call it difference.

Dissolving boundaries is good,
But colorblindness is not.
Recognizing difference is necessity,
But treating differently is brutality.

Sharing empathy
Spreads pain,
Diminishes it
Each in turn bearing less of the burden.

I don't live a very difficult life
But as an American I'd like to believe I know what is right.

Taught in preschool how to be proud of your nationality,
But not your individuality
Taught to fear the other,
But not how to defend one another
And stand together.

It was my duty to raise the flag every morning
Repeat in unison a pledge to a country
I did not even know
The history of.

Taught that order was to be valued above justice.

I don't want to be an American.
I used to think of myself as a statistic. What was the percent chance I had when I arrived on this
Earth to be a white middle-class American?

I was taught to love my privilege
 I taught myself to hate my privilege.
 Now I need to know how to use my privilege
 Or I plan to discard my American identity.

“white liberals love black martyrdom,”
 Written by a white liberal.
 How does one use their privilege to:
 defend another?
 confront conflict?
 unravel knots?
 spread out the pain?
 Without causing more
 Without being accused of self-righteousness.

I don't live a very difficult life,
 But that doesn't mean I can witness others' pain without feeling the world is going insane.

Message to the Future:

To be completely honest, I think the images and words above kind of tell you a lot of what you need to know about the time I come from. They will be buried beneath the Earth as a time capsule and perhaps unearthed, by you! But I hope you see time differently. See, we (Americans) think of time as linear. It lets us put things we don't want to deal with, like climate change, for example, in the distant future. It tends to make us incredibly anxious actually. In English, we say look forward to the future and leave the past behind which means we view the future as ahead of us and the past as behind us. This leads to a future-oriented society, one in which achievement and accumulation tend to displace community and connectedness. Since I'm coming from a Western culture, American culture, this is the perspective I have imbibed and been taught to embrace.

In nature, however, time follows a cyclical pattern -- the sun rises and sets -- and many other cultures recognize this. It is my hope that people start to view time more cyclically. That we turn toward a relationship-oriented society, rather than a thing-oriented one. That individuals are made conscious of the goal-oriented mindsets that have been thrust onto them, rendering them “little more than singular gratification-seeking units, ... sever[ed] ... from our broader communities whose pooled skills are capable of solving problems big and small.” The thing is, I see already in the communities that I am a part of and also those around the world, a pushback against this. Except, rather than pushing back we are gravitating together.

It seems important to acknowledge that there are people in the United States who don't want to change their linear view; they like their severed state; they like their blinders. We put these screens on the sides of horses' eyes so they don't get skittish or distracted and this mirrors the effectiveness of the American Dream in preserving a goal-oriented society that ignores that which has been sidelined, so that individuals don't get anxious about the system (capitalism) they're a part of and then try to reshape/restructure it! God forbid!

It also seems important to acknowledge that 2020 has been a deafening year. We are currently in the middle of a pandemic and huge issues like systemic racism have been brought to the forefront as a result of deaths that should never have happened and protests in response and in solidarity. What I chose to include here, however, is not a depiction of these events, but a reaction to a whole lot of turmoil and change they have created in the world. And my hope is that we not habituate ourselves to it but participate in movements to change it. That we not purposefully disregard that which is brought to our attention but engage with that content instead of becoming complacent. I hope by the time this is opened, that society (specifically those who can live pleasant, uninterrupted lives in the current system) has been awakened from a profound unconsciousness and that it refuses to go back to sleep.

Raquel Smith



To the viewer of this photo:

This photo is not a unique capture; it represents a small sample of what happened all over the world as we all battled one of the most intense pandemics to date. This photo was taken in 2020, amidst the coronavirus, or Covid-19, pandemic. Perhaps there have been pandemics much worse, or that have lasted longer, by the time this time capsule is opened, but right now we have faced what many newspaper outlets refer to as the largest quarantine / shut down in human history. It has been almost a year, and the end is barely in sight. It has been a year of masks and social distancing, of closed stores and widespread shortages, of misinformation, distrust, and protest, and overwhelmingly of isolation. However, amid such suffocating isolation, we have had no shortage of innovation in ways to come together and support each other. The photo above depicts people coming out on their balconies to clap in support of our health care workers and essential workers. You could be a resident of New York City, Rome, Beijing, or anywhere else in the world and remember the sounds of empty cities coming to life through applause or singing. Even if you didn't live in a metropolitan area, you watched the videos circulating social media. The gesture was a small symbol of hope in an overwhelming atmosphere of despair, and it was this and the many other small gestures of support that have kept us going throughout this difficult time. When the world seems so bleak and divided, it becomes imperative to remember that we still can come together and support each other as common citizens of the world, even through something as short and simple as a fifteen minute round of applause. This is the side of humanity I choose to remember.

Kat Finck

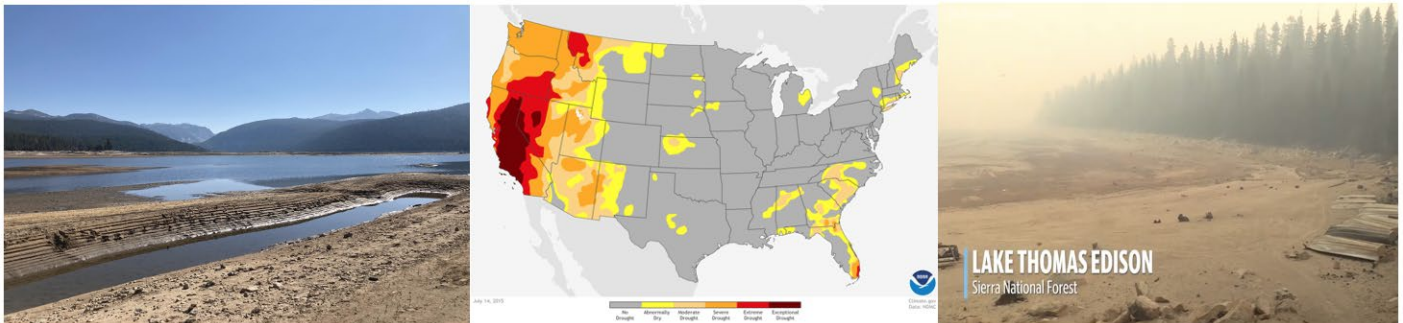


Figure 1: Lake Thomas Edison in the Sierra National Forest and in Fresno County, CA. Taken by me during the summer of 2020.

Figure 2: Map of fires across the U.S taken from NOAA.

Figure 3: Lake Thomas Edison in the Sierra National Forest after the fires that rampaged the area in the fall of 2020.

Wildfire Smoke Is Poisoning California's Kids. Some Pay a Higher Price.



Patricio Gonzalez, 12, and his family.

By Somini Sengupta | Photographs by Chang W. Lee | Graphics by Nadja Popovich

FRESNO, Calif. — The fires sweeping across millions of acres in California aren't just incinerating trees and houses. They're also filling the lungs of California's children with smoke, with potentially

We are all connected by the air we breathe. However, depending on where you live the quality varies dramatically. I'm assuming you are reading this in Vermont, a state in which climate change is more of a nuanced experience than in other parts of the country, such as Fresno California, where wildfires are currently incinerating trees and houses, filling the lungs of children with smoke. While I don't know what effects climate change will have on Vermont, I can predict that it won't be as devastating as Fresno. For many families in Fresno, they have no choice but to endure the air filled with dust and particulate matter deteriorating their bodies slowly. I challenge anyone reading my time capsule to learn about the different people embedded within a place of great beauty.

Nimaya Lemal

N. Lemal
Acrylic on canvas
2017, age 18



Dear Explorer,



N. Lemal
Ink on paper
2018, age 19



My name's Nimaya Grace Lemal (I use she/her/hers pronouns). "Nimaya" is the Hopi word "Nima" (to go home) with the suffix "aya" (a helper of). My lineage however, as far as I know, is almost entirely European (predominantly Irish, French, and English). I was born in my Godparents' house on October 19th, 1998 in Jamestown, Colorado, on Cheyenne land, but when I think of home I think of the woods in Ripton, Vermont (Abenaki land). I've attached four images in this time capsule, pieces of my artwork, which I think do something to chart my notion of the sublime in ages 16-21.

It is hard to imagine myself gone, to write to the time this capsule might be found. My parents say they grew up envisioning the future as an upward track, that the next generation would be better than today's because that is what progress is. My sister and I were taught the future is probably bleak and it is probably our fault—and there probably isn't much we can do to fix it. (As young adults, we are trying to re-imagine this latter theory).

This is 2020 on the U.S. east coast. A pandemic has swept the globe, people are supposed to wear simple fabric masks outside, and for the most part do. The police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor this summer sparked (inter)national protests to defund the police and support the Black Lives Matter movement. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris have just been elected. Climate change here looks like a warm winter, it is 50°F in December when I expect it to be 25°.

We know that our way of life—that of myself, my family, my friends, the characters in my films and books—has to stop. We know that Black and brown and Indigenous peoples are getting poisoned, starved, displaced right in our backyards, that whole countries have essentially been sanctioned to die. We know how and why land is being destroyed. We know that hundreds of species go extinct every day. We know the sacrifice zones that fuel the desires of a shrinking number of people, are growing. We know what violent arguments will rise to the forefront when panic begins to set in, because they are already in circulation and they aren't new. We've imagined the extent of the damage you might know. We don't want to do nothing.

The vast majority of the people I love, we know this culture doesn't serve us. We are tired, anxious, and lonely. We have little regard for spirituality, we have little connection to the Indigenous peoples of this land, we have few interactions with people who don't share our beliefs and lifestyle and level of income and education. Everywhere I look, people are afraid to use words like "dream" or "hope" with conviction, people are angry, people are scared. (This is what they call American success and convenience—this is what winning the game looks like.) Narratives about dominating (and innate) hatred and selfishness are so pervasive and invisible—a few years ago I believed we were in a very different world than the one I see now.

We are looking for new stories about who we are. I hope that your idea of humanity, of what we are supposed to want, is different from ours. I hope that where you are, humans are allowed to express pain when they see another living thing in pain, to hug and touch one another and tend to the earth without stigma. I hope that all genders and sexual-orientations are normal, so children are not nervous about who they are, or who they will love, but simply excited to be alive. I hope that womxn direct in all branches of leadership, particularly Indigenous matriarchs, Black womxn, and womxn of color. I hope that the story of human nature is centered not on our selfishness but on the scope of our empathy, not on our guilt but on the honor of making amends, not on sin but on our mammalian-ness, not on our discipline but on our creativity, not on a compulsion to eviscerate and dominate but on our compulsion to care, to create, to imagine, and to change.

I don't know who you are, who survived, or what the world looks like. I am so sorry for the mistakes that have contributed to your suffering. I imagine you are angry. If we did succeed, if we manage to divert course, to make something of this violent upending, then maybe my moment in history can be a beacon and precedent for your own battles (on this side of things, we don't know what's going to happen next, it looks wildly precarious, terrifying, usually hopeless, and still doesn't feel like history). If we did not succeed, take us as a lesson on where and how the machine of white supremacy and profit-making begins to run its drivers. Study us for all we are worth. There are 7.8 billion people on the planet this year. My generation is thinking of you.

Manya Kula



“We are New York tough.” This was the catchphrase of the summer in New York.

When the coronavirus pandemic hit the United States, New York was hit hard. I returned home from school to a drastically different reality. The city that never sleeps, incomplete without honking horns and bustling streets, was quiet, except for the continuous sound of ambulance sirens. The first few months were the scariest; hundreds of New Yorkers lost their lives each day, healthcare workers were regarded as heroes, and the end of one of the darkest periods in New York history seemed nowhere in sight.

When we were lacking a president we could rely on to lead us effectively, Governor Cuomo guided New York through the toughest months. In addition to ensuring New York had the necessary resources and regulations during the worst of it, he reminded New Yorkers that “We are New York tough,” and there is nothing we can’t overcome. The phrase started appearing everywhere; on road signs, commercials, masks, lawn signs. And for a lot of New Yorkers, as they did for me, the words gave a little bit of solace, reminding us how much our city has overcome, reminding us of our strength even at our weakest points.

July 11 was the first day the city saw no coronavirus deaths since the start of the pandemic in March, and although the pandemic is still raging today, that day was an accomplishment worth celebrating.

The global pandemic, social unrest, and a tumultuous election, to name a few of the challenging aspects of the last year, have made 2020 a year of ups and downs, but mostly downs. Some days have been more challenging than others, but we have been forced to reflect on the current state of our country and our world, and it provokes an uneasy feeling. There are very real feelings of fear and hopelessness, but the negative thoughts can’t be at the forefront.

The challenges we have faced over the last year will not be forgotten, but the year will more be defined by our ability to overcome the challenges. In the last twelve months, as a country, we have worked together to restore a competent government, promote justice through systemic change, and fight a pandemic. In our most hopeless moments, we must remember how strong and capable we are. The real takeaways of 2020 are not defeat or despair. 2020 was a year of unmatched resilience.

And for New Yorkers, this year will always serve as another reminder that “We are New York tough.”

Bayu Ahmad



Plastic Bags in a Box

This is how my lower-middle-class Indonesian family has saved our plastic bags for years. Even the box there has been reused several times before. In sharing this picture, I want to share a glimpse of how the everyday life of an average person interacts with the current environmentally destructive, consumerist culture. To your surprise, people often dispose of plastic bags after a single use. And this is just the bags: we use plastics for bottles and packaging, and the number of plastic bags in this box is way below the average plastic consumption of an individual in a year.

Beyond the literal display, one can use this picture to reflect on the past. Plastic bags were initially created to save the environment, yet ironically, the lack of their proper disposal and degradability turns out to hurt nature and wildlife. Plastic is made of oil, after all, and it depicts our existing (but hopefully discontinuing) reliance on fossil fuel. It is easy, cheap, and abundant, but it eventually hurts us. Largely, it symbolizes the system of exploitation we are living under.

Alternatively, one can view it through the lens of hope. Saving plastic bags, and not merely disposing of them after one use, is a common habit in many families - especially of the working class - and a product of a rather short-term environmental education. Hence, this picture, to me, also represents hope and resilience that by the time you are reading this, our society has continued to learn our lesson, evolve, and take measures for environmental justice that bear more significance. Ultimately, this picture symbolizes how we can and will contain what has been done.

And hopefully, plastic bags are disappearing. There are now promising ways to break down our plastic waste faster, such as through bacterial degradation. Also, more and more places like supermarkets are banning plastic bags. Perhaps, by the time you read this, you – a person in the future – are so troubled with how much plastic pollution we used to create. Perhaps, you can no longer hear about whales found with plastic bags inside them.

Connor Wertz



This picture represents self-medication and addiction. Self-medication is not a good thing; it is most often the result of chronic conditions – physical or mental – that go unrecognized or untreated. It could be pain from a work injury or from our sedentary way of life, or a feeling of emptiness because important parts of the human experience – socialization, meaning, security, love – are not being met. We are still at the beginning of scientifically understanding this, but there are a few of us in our society who believe that the isolated manner in which we cut ourselves off from our lived environment (both the human and non-human aspects of that word) creates a deep, implacable sense of loss. We often turn to drugs to “self-medicate” (to make us feel better, if only for a short while) for this unhealthy chronic condition. Since all these substances (and many others not pictured here, including sugar and caffeine) are addictive, addiction quickly becomes an important side-effect of self-medicating.

This is not unique to our society or to our place in history. Substances like alcohol and tobacco have served traditional cultural functions as well for thousands of years. And I don’t have the statistics to back up the fact that self-medication and addiction are key tenets of the Anthropocene. At this point in time, this society and this class is not experiencing violence, or hunger, or threatening biological needs. But I believe we are without purpose – we have a chronic unease with our present and our future, much of which has resulted because of the trauma of our past. While these objects might not be the first or best ways to describe the Anthropocene, they attempt to describe a darker side of the human psyche that is alive and well as I write, whether we admit it or not.

I hope that these can serve as metaphors, too, for the larger society-wide addictions we have, namely our addiction to growth and our current economic system. We know it’s killing us, and we can’t – or won’t – stop. Self-medication and addiction are personal and societal. It’s a symptom of the Anthropocene – of separating work from meaning, success from contentment, and our Earth and land from the sacred. It’s a symptom of the trauma of racism and violence (physical and not) and oppression that is passed down generationally through our bodies, and manifests in a feeling of emptiness.

I don’t think that we will begin the large-scale trauma healing that we need anytime soon; indeed, I think it will get worse as violence and tribalism increase in our warming world. If you see this heal yourself. Heal others. We all need it.

(Also just to qualify my video explanation: there *is* bodily violence in the Anthropocene, one clear example being the structural and bodily harm of black bodies that has been highlighted this past summer. But the psychological malaise that I’m trying to describe I believe to be pervasive as well, among those of privilege and those without [indeed, in some ways much more in White people or other folks with privilege])

Maddie Morgan



Ever since I was about 10 or 11, my family has collected heart shaped rocks wherever we've traveled to. It became such a big tradition that my dad spent \$15 to ship me a package to school this year with a rock in it... Anyway, from there I began taking pictures of the rocks wherever I found them. Instead of writing the date on the back of the rocks, it gave me some way of attaching that specific rock with a time and a location. I always believed that this was a little way that the earth and I were showing each other that we cared so deeply about one another. Mother nature would set aside an organically sculpted rock to say "hello, thank you for admiring my beauty."

Sometimes, when I'm out in these places with people who don't share the same tradition as my family, they wonder why I'm so enthralled by the rocks that I find. And to that I guess I'd say, looking at the ground and scavenging for little rocks gives me a fuller perspective of the world around me. When I watch the ground and look for glimmers of Earth's natural beauty, I notice the ways in which mosses have grown up the base of tree trunks, or how wildflowers grow in fields absent of trees, because I've noticed that trees cast shade and that shade stunts their growth. I also start to recognize the tiny paths, worn into the landscape by deer and elk and moose, and how the underbrush around these paths stops growing as the animals use it more and more. From here I start to see how the leaves on the trees now start growing about 1/4th of the way up the trunk, presumably to adapt to the overgrazing of animals.

To me, this goes to show how important even the tiniest things are in nature and how when we remove, everything goes out of balance. Wolves, for example. I will never personally remember a time when wolves ran freely in Yellowstone National Park, but they used to. After an influx of ranchers onto wolf inhabited land left the wolf population dangerously low and on the brink of extinction, they were "rescued," and I place quotes around the word rescued because I find it so ironic that we swoop in at the last minute to solve a problem that we created ourselves and then we go and pat ourselves on the back for doing so, and placed under federal protection. The remaining wolves were removed from the park and were taken to facilities where they could be protected from the outside world in hopes that they could repopulate.

The removal of the wolves proved to be insurmountably damaging to Yellowstone because of the important role that they played in moderating their eco system. Without wolves to prey on the elk in Yellowstone, the elk populated twofold and grazed down all of the vegetation. Much of this vegetation was essential in maintaining the integrity of the soil beds surrounding streams and rivers. However, when one pack of wolves was slowly reintroduced in 1995, this ecosystem returned to its balanced state. The elk retreated to more protected areas where the wolves had a harder time hunting them which allowed the vegetation in fields and around streams and rivers to flourish. The wolves brought life back into the park.

I guess my point here, in a round-about-wolf-loving-kind-of-way is that the natural world is incredibly delicate and every little thing that we do has a radical effect on it. But if the reintroduction of the wolves is any indicator, it's definitely not too late to reverse some of the (to

phrase it lightly) ecosystem imbalances we've singlehandedly produced as human beings. We need to appreciate the earth for what it is and not strip it of what we want or don't want from it. We have to look for the little hearts, admire their beauty, and preserve their longevity.

Zoey Ellis



Image of four Middlebury College students (left to right: Victoria Netter, Zoey Ellis (me), Cindy Cardona and Luis Daza Mendoza) pictured at Mead Chapel Hill in Middlebury, Vermont in November of 2020.

December 4, 2020

Hello Future,

My writing will be buried under The Knoll with many letters from my Middlebury College classmates who have done everything from sharing art to apologizing for your current situation. I want to take this moment to share the story of 2020, a year of resistance, quarantine, a pandemic, large social mobilization, anarchy, and growth. I tell you this story of the past, in hopes that it will inform your future. I plead that you learn from our mistakes, grow where we have failed, practice hope where we were hopeless, and continue creating a path for those after you.

I want to take this time to tell a story of 2020, as seen through my attached image.

COVID-19: First, you might see my picture and ask why we're wearing masks; trust me when I say it's not a fashion statement, but a necessity. As I write to you, the United States and the world is battling the Coronavirus Pandemic (aka COVID-19). By wearing masks, we are protecting ourselves and most importantly protecting those around us. This pandemic has created unprecedented times, but also spurred unforeseen human growth and collective action.

The People Are Rising: In 2020, I live in a time of structural inequality, where police officers can shoot unarmed black people with no consequences (look up the names Breonna Taylor and George Floyd for a starting point on these injustices) and we are also in a time where climate change disproportionately affects Brown and Black communities, often first and the hardest. In this context, my friends and I are people of color attending a predominantly white institution and our everyday existence is resistance to systemic oppression and racism. This spirit of resistance can also be seen in the story of 2020 through this year's nationwide protests, human empowerment efforts, community gatherings, and change. I hope that this picture serves as a reminder to keep on keeping on, even when the odds are stacked against you!

Even with these struggles, in 2020, I have taken so much for granted. In this image, the sun has set for another day, I have never seen acid rain or experienced a drought, water is accessible in every building on campus, and food is plentiful. I understand that in my story lies many privileges and I express immense sorrow for what we have left you to handle. In my telling of 2020, know that many people are concerned for the future (and for you) and seeking to make change.

In this story, lies our failures, our achievements, our greatest faults, and how to overcome them. You must understand where you came from, in order to understand where you need to go and I am writing to empower that movement forward.

March On and Power Be With You,

Zoey Ellis (20-year old college student from Chicago, IL) 🤖

Caroline Arena

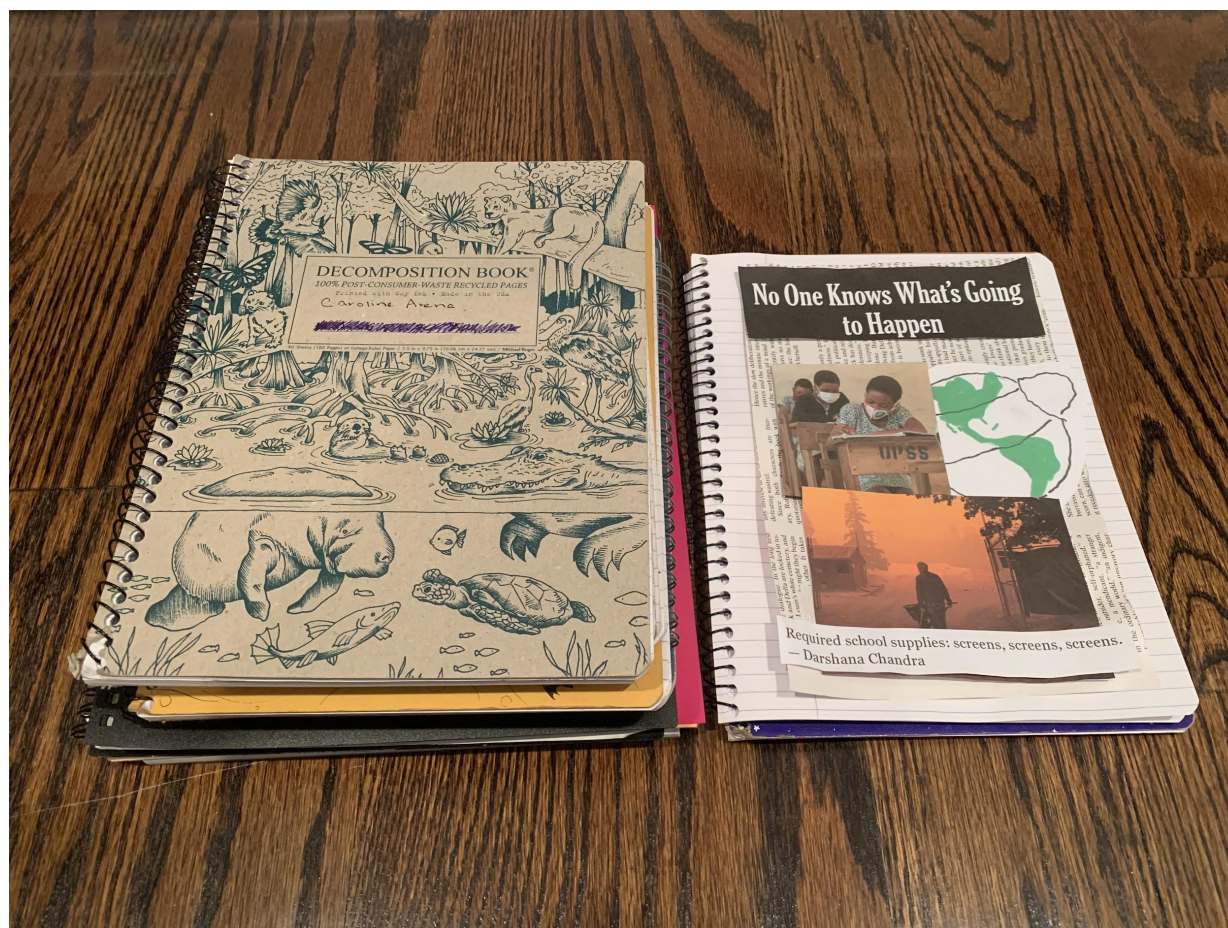


Photo Description: For my contribution to this project, I have chosen to feature a collection of my journals from the last few months and a sample of the articles I have clipped rather therapeutically from newspapers such as the *New York Times*. Together, they represent my effort to create order out of these highly tumultuous times, but also my desire to document them for future generations. In that way, my image offers you a time capsule within a time capsule!

Dear People of the Future,

We are finishing up our time capsule at a unique moment in history, and to be totally honest, it's not a particularly uplifting one. We are in the middle of a global pandemic, which has not only taken the lives of many of the world's citizens, but has robbed us of one of our major sources of joy -- the ability to come together as families and communities. Everywhere around us are images and soundbytes that don't make sense -- tall, gleaming office buildings that are empty of their occupants; teachers delivering lessons through computer screens (the very screens that many parents once tried to keep their children away from); and political leaders disputing scientific truths and flouting scientific advice at a time when their leadership is needed the most.

Our rapidly deteriorating physical environment, and the unrelenting harm that humans continue to inflict on it, is another source of worry. Over the last few years, we have witnessed record-breaking storms, community and life-threatening floods and wildfires, melting glaciers, and profound ecological damage. We worry about the world we live in today, and we worry more about whether there will be a remotely viable world left for those of you to whom we are directing this time capsule.

If there is one word that defines this moment in time, it is the word “uncertainty,” and many members of my generation have tried to navigate that uncertainty by channeling their thoughts into journals. My journals at least, which I offer you a glimpse of through the enclosed image, have helped me find order in an otherwise disordered world, and they have also helped me document this crazy period of human existence.

By pointing out all of the uncertainty in the world, I do not mean to convey a sense of despair. One of the silver linings of that uncertainty is that it has prompted many to stop and reassess -- to remind us that we need to pick our political leaders wisely, to continue to strive against racial oppression and wealth inequality, and that the choices we make -- whether as individuals or as a nation -- have real consequences. The fact that there is uncertainty means that there are still glimmers of hope for the future.

My hope for you is that my generation will continue this process of reassessment, that we will continue to be reflective, and that we will deepen our commitment to bringing order to bring order to our world. I hope that by the time that you discover our time capsule, the world will be a less uncertain place. Or I hope, at a minimum, that you will be better equipped to embrace that uncertainty than we were.

With all my love and hope,

Caroline

Jackson Hawkins

This photo was taken at the Knoll before the start of classes in Middlebury's Fall 2020 semester. This was the first semester of school during the COVID-19 pandemic, and nobody was quite sure how things would shake out – we were all holding significant tension around even our chances of not being sent home as the result of an outbreak on campus, let alone what a successful semester would look like beyond that. We weren't used to wearing masks all the time, we had painfully refrained from hugging friends we hadn't seen for too long, and many of us were anxiously awaiting the reintroduction of classes conducted via Zoom.

As we were grappling with these and other uncertainties of life at Middlebury amidst the Coronavirus pandemic – staring into this relatively short-term (but not insignificant) unknown, as it were – we were still searching for glimpses of a college experience as we knew it. In some ways we found that normalcy in a late August thunderstorm that rolled in just before sunset. When news of the impending downburst came, several of us gathered up our raincoats and masks and dashed towards the Knoll, hoping to experience the weather in all its glory from the shelter

out there. Although we didn't make it before the rain started, we all took joy in the fat rain drops that fell and the thunder that rumbled to our south.

On the one hand, this storm is indicative of much of 2020 and what the time ahead will look like. That summer, Vermont was parched by a significant drought, conditions which harm many facets of the human world and decrease the land's ability to absorb rainwater when it does fall. That means that, although this passing thunder cell was accompanied by a large deluge, it's likely that less was absorbed than would've been in a standard summer. The occurrence of both drought and severe weather is predicted to increase as climate change continues its destructive course, so scenarios like this one may well become more common in the future, along with countless other adverse impacts. On a more metaphorical note, this storm could easily represent the various challenges and hurdles that 2020 and the semester had to offer; from the obvious COVID-19 pandemic, to the presidential election, to the rapidly shrinking window we* have to address climate change, these months certainly did not lack in struggle.

But despite all the bad that this storm may or may not be indicative of, we still found a way to take joy in it. As we ran back and forth in the grass, our masks and pants rapidly soaking through, we couldn't help but laugh and smile, enjoying the water and being with friends again. As we walked back towards campus, the thunderstorm rolled past, revealing the most spectacular sunset any of us had seen for a long time. To me, that sunset after an intense storm serves to represent the room for positive change that there is in the coming years. This could come in a vast array of formats, and far more than I can even envision now.

I feel that this photo of my friend noticing the brightening sunset as the storm recedes can tell a compelling story of what is needed now. It will be hard to find the wonderful, joyous things in the tumultuous world that is being created (and already exists), but there is space for positive change to come out of it. Even if there isn't, I'm not sure how I could grapple with all the work in front of us without some sort of potential for real improvement. While nothing is certain, and you will know in greater detail the way the world has responded to these challenges, I hope that this photo will be retrospectively indicative of where society stands today – emerging from a tumultuous time and looking towards a shining future of possibility.

Be well.

*whomever "we" may turn out to be

Abby Schneiderhan

2. Patagonia

Based In | California, USA

Ethics | Fair Trade Certified collections, organic cotton, environmental sustainability

Best For | Fair trade outdoor clothing

Product Range | Women's & men's outdoor apparel, swimwear, activewear

Size Range | XXS-XXL; up to US 22

Price Range | \$\$

Patagonia was one of the earliest defenders of environmental ethics in the activewear fashion industry, and one of the first adopters of using recycled materials and switching to organic cotton. Patagonia is expanding its commitment to labor ethics and works with US factories as often as it can, including in Texas and North Carolina. We admire Patagonia for the positive personal impact its fair trade factories have around the world.

SHOP PATAGONIA



Ad • www.thereformation.com/

Reformation® Official Site - Easy on the earth.

Being naked is the #1 most sustainable option. We're #2. Shop **Reformation's** latest...

New Clothing Dresses Jeans Basics Sweaters Weddings Collections Gift Guide Sustainability Search

Ref fiber standards

Up to 2/3 of the sustainability impact of fashion happens at the raw materials stage - before the clothes have actually been made. Fiber selection also affects how you're gonna wash the garment, and potentially recycle it one day - both important factors to consider when it comes to the environmental impact. That's why we have Ref standards, or basically different classifications based on their combined social and environmental impact.

We tried to make these standards as holistic as possible, taking into consideration water input, energy input, land use, eco-toxicity, greenhouse gas emissions, human toxicity, availability and price. We also looked at garment care implications, like microfiber shedding.

We have five categories:

A--Allstars
Natural fibers that are rapidly renewable, plant-based and have a potential for circularity.

B--Better than most
B fibers are almost all natural or recycled fibers.

G THE GOOD TRADE FASHION BEAUTY SELF HOME CULTURE HOLIDAY THE DAILY GOOD ABOUT

Finally—Your Guide To Sustainably-Made Sneakers

STAFF GUIDE - FASHION



My contribution to our time capsule is this small collage of a collection of screen shots from different websites related to online shopping right now. Some of the brands included are Reformation, a women's clothing and accessory brand, Patagonia, an outdoor clothing and gear brand, and Veja, a sneaker brand. I've also included screenshots from the website the Good Trade which is a website that is meant to help provide advice for 'sustainable living' and more 'eco-conscious' fashion. All of these brands are meant to be a sustainable alternative to purchasing the same things from their less "eco-friendly" counterparts. I think you might find this interesting because I think that it captures just a small part of how the environmental movement plays into the lives of some people like my friends and I who are students at Middlebury. These brands all include a section related to the environment on their websites citing the environmental impact made by these companies in the production of their clothing. Purchasing clothing or items from sustainably made brands, even when it is sometimes more expensive, has become a trend among many different groups of people and a way for people to justify their consumerism (something that I myself am definitely guilty of). My intention with this collage is to try to provide a snapshot of something that is relatively new and gaining in popularity among many different groups of people right now: sustainable fashion. This is emerging at a time where access to the very cheap fast fashion industry which is responsible for enormous amounts of waste is also being made easier and easier. These three brands along with others like them are slightly more expensive than their less sustainable counterparts making them

slightly` more exclusive and less accessible to many people who cannot afford them. I think that this collage helps give some context for the way in which shopping right now is overlapping with the environmental movement and I hope that it will show what sustainable options in our current economy look like since I`m assuming all of this will be vastly different in the future.

Piara Biggs



Hello future Midd kids!

This little guy represents a lot of things. He's the first gift I ever received. As a Chinese zodiac animal, he's symbolic of my character and my Asian heritage. He's a relic from 1999, the 1900s and the millennium of the 1000s. And, as I'm writing this message in the year 2020, he also represents an endangered species.

For me, this particular tiger is a toy, a gift, and a symbol. And for my generation, tigers as a species are still a part of our world. In my lifetime I've probably seen 3 or 4 of them (sadly all in circuses or zoos) but I've seen images of them and real life, current footage of them in magazines and nature documentaries. I'm hoping that that's still the case for you. That tigers still exist outside of the pages of a biology textbook. I hope that they can still be found in the wild or at the very least that some are still being raised by humans in protected environments.

But there's a possibility that as a part of this time capsule, this image of a tiger may end up representing the passing of time. Right now some subspecies of tigers are endangered while others are critically endangered. At the beginning of the 1900s, it's estimated that there could've been as many as 100,000 tigers living in the wild. At the end of the 1990s, around the time when I received this tiger, there were less than 6000. As I am writing this, that number has dropped to less than 4000. In the past few years there have been reports and articles warning that over 500 mammal species could go extinct by 2100 and even reports warning that 50% of the species that currently exist could go extinct by 2100. These are estimates and hopefully worst case scenarios. But only you know what the reality is in your time.

So some questions for you: How many tigers are left? Do they live in the wild? Have their habitats gotten smaller or are more areas protected? What about other animals? How many of the endangered species of my day are still a part of your world?

As you look at this image and think about these questions, I hope that you'll take a moment to appreciate all of the beautiful, finite things that are a part of your world and to remember all of the things that existed in the past.

In friendship,

Piara Biggs

Anika Heilweil



Hello future people!

I am writing to you in 2020, from Eastern Vermont, thinking about you, in the future reading this. I have enclosed a picture of a snow globe that has been by my side for the past three years.

This snow globe was given to me by a close friend from home in Salt Lake City before I left for college in Middlebury, Vermont.. It shows the mountain that I live in the shadow of and an idealized version of the city. It reminds me of home, and of my childhood when I still considered the city to be the ideal, shining place that it is in the snow globe. Whenever it snows, the city seems glowing and enchanted, and the snow globe reminds me of how calm everything becomes in the snow.

The snow in the globe will never melt or stop falling when I shake the globe. By the time this time capsule is opened, there may never be real snow in Salt Lake City and snow globes could be the closest we get to snow. Throughout my life, there has been less and less snow falling in Utah, and I'm worried that within my lifetime, I will be using the snow globe to remember a time when blankets of snow fell over the city.

The globe was made in China, where it was inscribed with "Utah: The Beehive State", before finally being sent to the state it pictures. Under free trade capitalism we are able to get goods from all over the world at a low price, but we have no idea how these goods were produced or how workers are exploited. This globe has travelled thousands of miles and passed through many hands. While this keepsake gives me comfort and reminds me of home, how could this trinket be worth the exploitation of human lives and natural resources that it represents and contributed to?

I hope you have stumbled upon this time capsule in a time of peace and happiness, and it brings you memories of moments past.

Love,

Anika

Karolina Lexova



Hello, human of the future!

My name is Karo (the one in the Bernie shirt) and this is my contribution to my class' time capsule. I'm an exchange student from Austria who's currently studying at Middlebury College in Vermont.

The image you're looking at was taken by my Dad at my childhood home in Lower Austria in 2020. You can see my two older sisters, my Mom, and myself eating a festive dinner. We were celebrating that we could be together again after months of being apart because of the Covid-19 pandemic. (I'm sure you've heard about 2020 in your history classes.) We're eating duck. Well, only my parents are eating it. The rest of us are vegetarian. We're probably talking about the pandemic, our plans for the weekend, or what movie to watch after dinner.

With this image, I wanted to depict hope for the future. Not some grandiose, utopian form of hope, like the US finally becoming carbon-neutral, but rather a smaller form of hope, the baby steps towards a better future. (I'm talking about climate change here.) I wanted to showcase how

us humans of the 21st century still have a lot of demons to battle (e.g. living in excess: Who really needs to eat duck?), but I also wanted to portray that we are making progress. While my parents still eat meat, my sister and I don't anymore. Yes, most of us today are still meat-eaters and atmospheric polluters, but there is a breath of fresh air coming with younger generations. Even in my own family there already is a certain generational gap. I don't have a lot of hope for the future, but the hope that I do have comes from young people around me who are already making a change.

With this simple example from my life I want to show you that not all of us were looking away in 2020. Maybe it's naive to think that these small gestures will have any substantial effect on the future. After all, we need deep socioeconomic reforms to effectively battle climate change. However, there's something in me that wants to believe that when big changes fail, small ones can matter. Maybe it's my survival instinct kicking in, or maybe it's the last sliver of optimism left in me. Whatever it is, I wish this "breath of fresh air" I described earlier develops into a benevolent tropical cyclone of fresh air and the generations to come start treating our planet with respect.

I sincerely hope we figured things out and you're living in a less tumultuous and cruel world than ours. I hope you, humanity, and Mother Earth are all thriving. And if you're not, I at least want to leave you with a credo Austrian people live by: "Des wird scho." In the end, everything will turn out ok!

Yasmine Signey

Not the environmentalist America asked
for but the environmentalist we deserve



As a member of Generation Z, there are many things that define our generation and the ways in which we communicate with each other. Social media is the main tool that we use to access each other and communicate across the world. On social media, we use multimedia such as gifs and pictures in conjunction with jokes to create images called memes that are spread quickly throughout the internet. In my time capsule, I have included an image of a meme as I think that it represents me, my generation, and this class very well. A picture speaks a thousand words, and a meme speaks a million words.

Aforementioned, the first reason I chose a meme is that they are very relevant to our generation. As someone who actively engages in “meme culture,” I decided that it would be great to put something that I engage in often. The specific meme that I chose was a meme of Paris Hilton. I love Paris Hilton and actively look up Paris Hilton memes and quotes that are on Pinterest. By including a Paris Hilton meme, I felt like I was staying true to myself and something that is personal to me.

The meme is very satirical and is poking fun at environmentalism while also bringing awareness to the environmental crisis. If someone were to watch the full video that this Paris Hilton clip was taken from, they would be able to understand the satire that is present. The meme also presents lots of satire as Paris is literally wearing the plastic that she said was found in the stomachs of sea turtles (in the video she throws the plastic on the ground and walks away).

As for the meme itself, I chose a meme that is funny and talks about environmentalism because this is an environmental justice course. Although the item in the time capsule did not have to discuss environmentalism, I still decided to include it in my item since it was completely possible. All in all, I felt like this was a great image to include as it puts my generation into perspective in one picture. We tend to turn serious situations into jokes and memes in order to cope with them.

To the future students that are looking through Middlebury’s archives, don’t take things too seriously. Sometimes turning situations into jokes or memes can be helpful coping mechanisms. I also hope that you enjoy the current trends in your culture just as I have enjoyed these trends. Not only are they funny, but they can also be informative. Take the time to use what you can to communicate and share valuable information.

Qiting (Tina) Cai



December 04, 2020

Dear Future Recipient of this letter,

Hello from 2020 (!) — a year full of drastic changes, surprises, and craziness. This might just be the perfect moment for a time capsule to record many emotions and thoughts we shared for the present as well as for the future. The picture I have included aims to convey a message about our current living style. I hope you can find joy opening this time capsule made by a group of Middlebury students while learning about many highlights of our age.

Can you believe this? We as human civilization as a whole have already envisioned an inhabitable future — one with degraded environment and extinct species. We worried because we know our destructive behaviors will be reflected in the future world and impact many proceeding generations. I am living in an unprecedented difficult time, not just because the global pandemic crisis that is happening right now took away over a million human lives, the global climate crisis has led to extreme weather events and resulted in social disparities, but also because the society that I am currently part of is ecologically and socially unsustainable. Many have failed to imagine a future on earth, struggling to grab the last piece of hope. We imagine the approach of the apocalypse, and we are concerned about the effects of climate change—sea level rising, irregular extreme weathering events (I hope they have not become the “new normal” that your generation needs to adapt to).

Human society is also continuously undergoing a period of rapid transformation through the development of technology. Among them, many have faith in geoengineering to bring earth out of this climate crisis. None of us know how the future looks like, and you have better ideas about how the world has become than any of us do.

Though the world you live in might look alien to us, I hope your generation does not suffer from any of the consequences resulting from our unsustainable living styles. Despite everything that is happening right now, I believe there is evidence of hope because there are many of us who care about preserving the natural environment as well as the well beings of future generations. There are so many individuals out there who are committed and courageous, who have never given up believing in your future and the future of humanity. Maybe your generation has already owned the technology to combat the climate crisis; maybe you all have learned to maintain a harmonious human-nature relationship — it is my wish that your generations can learn from us and not repeat the same mistakes that we have already made.

I hope this letter finds you in good emotional states and spirits. While you may be spending more time unfolding the mysteries of our time, I hope you know about our passions and the time many of us have devoted working to ensure a future in which you can flourish. Thank you so much for reading along :)

With love,

Qiting (Tina) Cai

Middlebury Class of 2023

KK Laird



It is 2020.

We are standing at a crossroad.

It is a critical time in history.

I assume people have always thought their time is critical.

But rarely have the lives of all people and future generations been so dependent on current action.

Rarely, if ever, has the potential for such extreme catastrophe been possible by inaction.

I dearly hope this first image is not foreign to you in 2100.

But no matter how it looks where you are, I want to show you what choices we had in 2020.

I want you to know the degradation of our planet was neither natural nor inevitable.

I want you to know that we are likely some of the last people who still have the option to stop the current trajectory of our heating planet.

After this, we might be at a point of no return.

I have hope that when you read this, the world you live in is more symbiotic with nature than my current world is. I hope humanity has adapted, that we have learnt our lessons. I hope that society is not merely driven by capitalist forces, that it is fairer and more equal than it is today. I hope climate change has revealed the best in humanity – how we can work together to solve seemingly insurmountable problems. How we can care about people we do not know on the other side of the planet, and how we can sacrifice for them.

However, if your planet does look similar to the second picture, I want you to know who did this. It is not all of us in 2020 who are to blame. On the contrary, many on our shared planet already feel the dire consequences of climate change. And many are working to combat it.

Those who are to blame are those of us who are unwilling to open our eyes. Or those who can see but still prioritize profits over people. It is those of us who are still unaffected by the rising temperatures and who feel entitled to our tax cuts, cheap gasoline and new clothes. It is those politicians with power who watch forest fires destroying countless species and who remain idle and silent. It is those of us who vote for those silent politicians. It is those of us who can see this picture of what we have already destroyed without feeling a pit in our stomach. Or even if we do feel a pang of guilt – it is those of us who can forget it a second later.

This is a tribute to the earth as we knew it.

It will change.

If we let it.

I hope we have not let you down.